PITTSBURGH FAN FORUM

In this issue

TOM HEGEMAN STEVE GERBER RON KIENZLE

BEN PONDEXTER HOWARD SIEGEL

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Comic book covers © Marvel Comics Group. Thought for the day: Help!

CLUB business....

Next meeting: The PCC next meets at 6:30 PM on Saturday, July 9, at Eide's Comics Shop, 11 Federal St., across the Sixth St. Bridge, in Pittsburgh. While we're on the subject of meetings, we would like to congratulate Greg Eide and his record-selling partner (damn, we keep forgetting to ask his name) on their success and great service during the first few months in the new location.

Anniversary Edition: It's that time of year again, to start your work on the PCC's Fifth Annual August ANNIVERSARY EDITION. As always, you are to write, draw, or conjure up at least one page of material, make 100 copies thereof (or give Ben Pondexter $4.00 and he'll take care of printing), and send 'em to Gentle Ben. We are going for 100% participation this year! Don't delay! Deadline is the July meeting. GET TO WORK! Remember — black and white, 8 1/2 " X 11".

If you received last year's Fourth Anniversary Edition without contributing to it (you know who you are) then you are obliged to contribute at least two (2) pages this year.

This year's special edition contains special features! The first 25 contributors receive one section in full color. Also, there'll be a special Club Handbook supplement, and the adventures of Elasticworm and Captain Pittsburgh (ta-daaa!) done by Tim Corrigan.

Shop talk: Greg Eide informs us that if you want to redecorate the basement of his shop (where we hold the meetings themselves), we're free to do so. If you have any ideas, or know some things about interior decorating (like, what types of material one can bang nails into, and the like) please let us know! We will have a mass work party on the days the actual work is done.

PITTCON: Well, PITTCON '77 went very well for the PCC and nearly all involved, and unless there's an outraged cry, we'll have a PITTCON '78 also at the Webster Hall Hotel next year. In fact, we made a profit (approx. $100) on PITTCON '77, despite many unexpected occurances!! To insure some revenue for 1978's convention, we will hold a similar raffle as we did last year, more about which will be reported next issue. Meanwhile, we're soliciting ideas about programming and the logistics of next year's comic art convention, as always

Miscellaneous: How does everybody like the new size of PFF? On this smaller format, PFF should be cheaper to print and mail.****If you're interested in attending the 1977 Comic Art Convention in Philadelphia, John Persky is planning a car pool to Phil Seuling's con. ****Thanks to new member Roger Schoolcraft for his wonderful slide show of PITTCON '77 shown at the May meeting. We're looking forward to more great things from Roger, an undoubtable Dave Cockrum fan (in joke!)****Who wants to drive into New York sometime in August for a softball rematch with the Marvel team? Tim Kupin is organizing a team. If you want to play in the game, though (and partake of the meal afterward), you must attend practice sessions. ****Happy 18th birthday, Editor

by Tom Hegeman

Sooner or later, if your interests in in comics range beyond buying the latest Marvels or deciphering the mystic messages of Howard the Duck, you are going to run across the work of Jean-Jaques Sampé. It may be today or next week. But sooner or later you'll discover his work and unless you are a total turkey, you'll be glad you did.

Sampé, one of France's foremost, like all great cartoonists, is international in his appeal. Born in August, 1932, in Bordeaux, he studied at the École Comminale à Bordeaux. Since 1950, his cartoons have appeared in such magazines as Sud-Ouest Dimanche, Punch, and Paris-Match. He has two children and enjoys sports and music.

Like most good cartoonists, Sempé concernes himself with people and their problems and foibles. You don't have to be French to understand him— most of his cartoons are wordless, especially among his best.

Actually, if you look at a Sempé and don't laugh out loud immediately, you should not feel guilty or ignorant. His cartoons do not evoke laughter. Rather, they bring about an inner smile, a realization that he has looked at men and women, seen past any facade, and conveyed what he has seen.

"Nothing is simple." This is the title of an early collection of Sempé's cartoons. A fair statement of his philosophy. But his drawing style is deceptively simple. He uses no more lines than necessary in delivering very complex ideas.

One of Sempé's favorite themes is the difference between a person's thoughts and desires, and reality. One of my favorites has a mild-mannered clerk named J. Lambert passing a newsstand and seeing the headline, " Who is the new love of B. B. (Briget Bardot?" . He spends the rest of his trip to the office imagining headlines claiming him to be the lover of Bardot, Liz Taylor, Christine Keeler. At work, his boss, a Mr. Dubos, chews him out for being late. The final panel shows him going about his petty clerical duties imagining a giant headline, "NOW I TELL ALL, by J. Lambert— Chapter 1: THE GROTESQUE AND RIDICULOUS MR. DUBOS. " Sempé understands the human condition. How many of us have not had similar day dreams? It isn't something you laugh uproariously at, but you recognize yourself and smile. Score one for Sempé.

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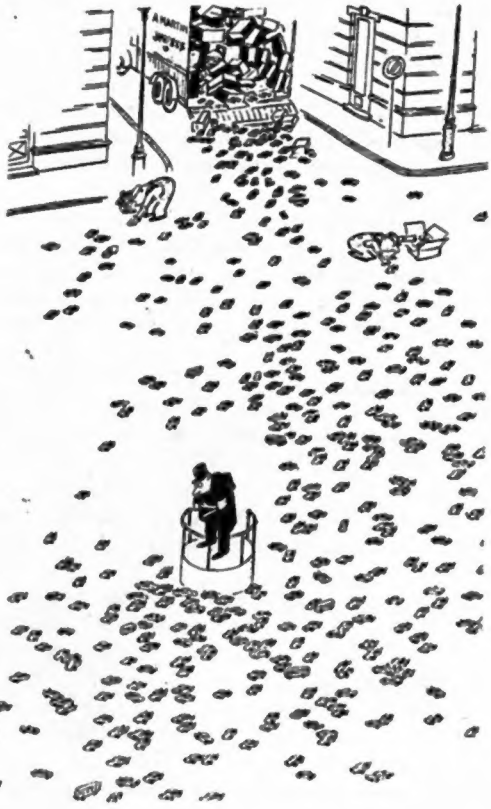
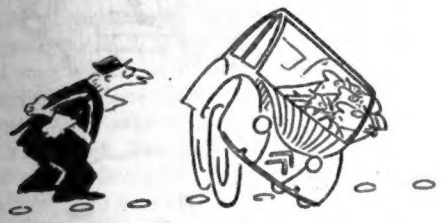


One of his more thought-provoking cartoons shows a middle aged married couple eating dinner peacefully. The husband, however, is shown having thoughts of beating and pummelling his wife with vicious glee. In the end, he flips a pea at her and she scolds him gently with he finger. Who knows what evil. . . ?

Another recurring theme concerns short people and psychiatrists. All involve the same chain of events: small man goes to psychiatrist because he has problems about his height, psychiatrist reassures him, something happens to short man. One of these classics shows a man explaining to a psychiatrist how he is ashamed of being short. The shrink tells him that height is of no importance and offers the example of Napoleon. The man goes away happy. In the last panel we see him outside the doctor's office, hand stuck in his coat, thinking he is Napoleon.



Sempé's knowledge about what makes people laugh is best demonstrated in a cartoon in Sauve Qui Peut (every man for himself). At the start, we see a funeral procession. A woman is walking along the street and slips, dropping several packages. One of the mourners sees this and starts to snicker. The snicker grows to laughter until finally he has to leave the procession. He stands laughing in the doorway of a theater where he draws quite a crowd. He goes in, to see a Charlie Chaplin movie. The crowd laughs as Chaplin slips off a sidewalk. The man starts to cry. In fact, the Mary Tyler Moore Show used the same situation a few years back for their "Chuckles The Clown" episode.

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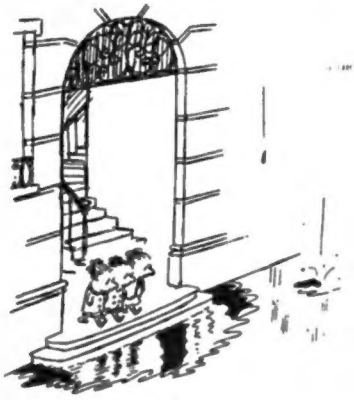

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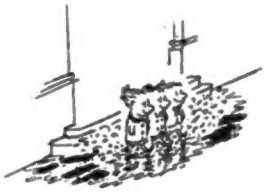

Explaining or describing a cartoonist's work is a tricky business at best. With Sempé, it is harder than usual. The only way to really appreciate the man's work is to see it. Fortunately, if you want to do just that, his work can be found in the United States. Collections of his cartoons can be purchased in paperback from FIAF / le Bookstore / 22 E. 60th St. / NYC, NY, 10022. Write for a list of books available and their prices.

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Cartoons © 1977 by Editions Denoel and Sempé.

And Now, A Word From Our.....

Ron Kienzle

This is my post-PITTCON column. First, I must thank our guests, Howard Siegel, Nelson Bridwell, Jim Shooter, Paul Levitz, Howard Bender, Ron Wilson, Kieth Pollard, Arv Jones, Roger Slifer, Dave Cockrum, and especially Len Wein. Without Len, most of the rest would not have come. The con did deserve being renamed Weincon, and if we make it to New York for the Great Softball Rematch, we should treat Len to a fairly expensive meal (under thrity dollars a head, plase?).

I express my regrets that the con was not even better to Len and the guests. We did have troubles. My personal inclination would be to invite them all again next year to show them what we can really do.

And we can do better. Let us not use the excuse that by moving the con from that %$#*& university to the Webster Hall Hotel was the single source of problems. There was a lack of internal club communication. There was a lack of organization. There was a lack of club members willing to work. Yet some people worked beyond any reasonable expectation. Did Ben attend any workshops, talk sessions, or especially the plot session (remember that Ben is a great Avengers fan)? Why did Elmer Harkema bother coming when he had to run from the con to an event at CMU? He surely didn't make money on the con. Greg did not even set up a dealer table at the con because there wasn't room. There are many others; Mark Lerer, Tim Kupin, John Persky, Jack Smith, and Jom Coon, who flew in from Indiana. Those who worked, including many whose names I forget, should get into the next PITTCON free. It is not enough to subscribe to Pgh. Fan Forum. A member works. Are you a member? (To those who, for "good" reasons, such as distance and prior committments, could not make the con, the above is not aimed at you. It was directed at those who live in the Pittsburgh area, and who attended the con, who did not do anything. The club can do without you people.)

As for next year, let's talk to each other, and get things done early. If we don't have a firm unbreakable commitment from a hotel by January 1, 1978, then forget it.

For those who don't know, the editor of this publication, Mark Lerer, is going off to college in September. Mark has done a fine job. He has, at times, strangely edited my various columns, more often than not correcting my very bad spelling and occasional bad grammar. He has worked to make this fanzine worthy of being mentioned in the Price Guide. It was he who did most of the contacting of pros for PITTCONs. It was he whom Ben could depend on. He is what a club member should be. We'll miss you Mark; visit us from Princeton often.

I hope that the next editor can, at least, equal what Mark has done.

For those interested in trips, we hope to arrange the rematch with Marvel at softball, after their ignominious defeat last year. Since no one in his right mind is going to the July con in Philadelphia we're arranging some weekend in August for the game. There will be a minicon with no dealers invited (No, you can come, Jack McGonicle, for, considering some of the pitching we get, we'll need a big catcher.). Also, Ben, Jim Coon, John Persky, and I are still planning on the San Diego convention. Come on, it has to be better than Philadelphia!

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DOCTOR STRANGE VERSUS DOCTOR STRANGER YET!
WHO IS HE-- WHAT IS HE?!

An Interview With Steve Gerber

Part II

(Last issue, we touched on the commercial and artistic aspects of the comic book industry, and Steve Gerber's reputation for "doing crazy things," among other topics. Herewith, we present part two.)

ML: We've spoken of the limitations of the medium. What are they, specifically?

SG: Whoo! All right. The code, for openers. But everybody knows there's not much to say about that.

ML: I understand that the code is not taken that seriously any more.

SG: That's not true! There've been a lot of instances where stuff of mine, stuff of Don McGregor's particularly-- he's had a lot of trouble with those people. It doesn't happen too frequently and most of the stuff I, at least, want to do in comics doesn't ordinarily conflict with the code. But there are times when a character should be able to say things that the code will not permit him to say. The way the code has interfered with me sometimes-- the way it has interfered with Don and other writers-- is as sort of an obstacle to verisimilitude. That's really all that need be said about it.

Other limitations of the comics? You do, unfortunately, have the limitations of the publishers, the publisher's vision. How much they are willing to admit into their line of sight. How much they are willing to let their minds expand to encompass a particular idea. One of the most frequent complaints I get, especially about books like OMEGA is, "Gee, Steve, this is interesting, but it's not comics." Well, I don't have that fixed a definition of what comics is. What they're saying is that it's not escapism, purely. Yet, the duck, who has the most escapist concept probably extant right now-- people raise their eyebrows at that, too!

Then we get down to the real, nitty gritty limitations of the medium. We have a printing process that only reproduces thirty-two colors. This presents a severe limitation in terms of textures and moods you can create. We have artists, who, though very competent at what they do now, are largely untrained at illustrating human expression. They've got a repetoire of about six facial expressions, and they've been trained, really, and encouraged by the companies to learn how to draw massive machinery and strange space ships and explosions and that sort of stuff and not human beings. So we're limited that way. It's a medium of caricature, of visual shorthand.

We're limited in the amount of copy we can write, because if you write too much you cover up the pictures and then it really isn't comics. We're limited by the format. A story can't run eighteen pages. It can't run seventeen-and-a-half pages. It has to be seventeen pages. Most of it comes down to packaging and reproduction. The physical and technological limitations are staggering.

It's remarkable that what has been done in the comics has been produced! The innovations that have been brought to this medium, considering these limitations, are remarkable. You don't see this kind of innovation, really, even in a medium like television! Film, of course, outstripped us long ago. As mass media go, the people in the comics have been striving at times, particularly the

artists, and what has been accomplished has been remarkable.

But limitations exist. I'm not sure that comics can ever be a vehicle for serious drama or possibly even satire. I'm not sure you can go much beyond parody.

ML: But you have attempted serious drama and satire. Have those attempts not been successful?

SG: Those attempts were what convinced me of the limitations of the form. No, I found them very frustrating. A lot of the readers seem to have responded to them, but I think what they responded to was the attempt, more than what was actually achieved. Nothing I did in the MAN-THING series--

ML: Yeah, I was thinking of the MAN-THING series in particular.

SG: My own feelings about that were that I was embarrassed by a lot of the letters! I was glad on one level that I was touching these people this way, but it seemed so much like television soap opera and stuff that was only innovative because the rest of the comic books were twenty years behind the times. I felt silly taking credit for it! Some of those stories I'm embarrassed by!

ML: Such as?

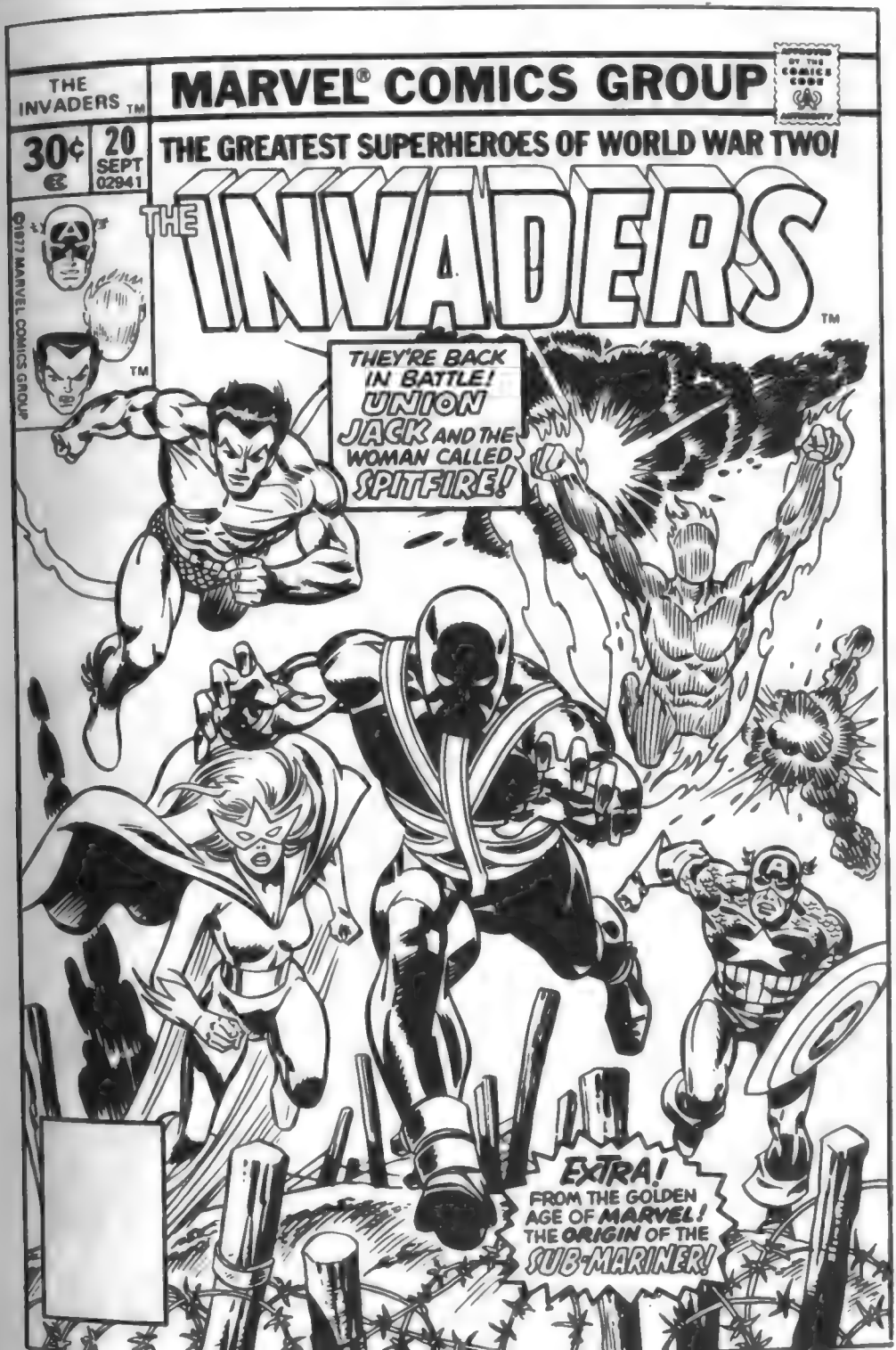
SG: The one that I think Brian Earl Brown called "Bus of Fools," "A Question of Survival." I look at a story like that now, and I'm really tempted to laugh nervously at it. It was a very primitive attempt at the very thing I loathe most of the disaster movies for. All the stereotyped characters-- it was like dumping Sgt. Fury's brigade in the swamp and letting them focus on their racial and ethnic differences for seventeen pages, stagger out the girl and the child and the cliche ending. I dislike that story intensely. The Edmond story, "A Kid's Night Out," is not quite as much of an embarrassment but it wasn't terribly successful either, becuase in the end, mostly because of deadline pressures, I found myself resorting to that silly scene in the gym with the girl hanging from the rings and Man-Thing walking in as a deus ex machina battering everybody to death. It got silly, after an attempt to really build up something. I do like some of the dialog in that story. I do like portions of the text pages we did in that story. But overall I was not pleased with it. It didn't work for me.

ML: If I could tie this in with another quote, you once said that your inclination has been toward extreme tragedy or extreme humor.

SG: Or the two intermixed.

ML: Oh?

SG: I find "humorous tragedy" a very appealing combination. The "Four Feathers of Death" story, the "Decay Meets The Mad Viking" story-- these stories represent to me something that hasn't been done in comics since the EC's, where you have the most horrible things happening in the silliest possible way. The viking character had a specific intent, parodying all those macho stereotypes we've got in the comics. I wanted to create this aura of tragedy and decadence and glitter and silliness, and present this real tragedy in what I think was a very humorous way. There was blood spilled; there was death all around, but to me that was a very funny story.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DR. DOOM AND MAGNETO!
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IS THIS THE FINAL HOUR?
DOOM SUPREME!
MAGNETO HAS DARED TO CHALLENGE ME!
BOW, SLAVES-- AND SHOW HIM EARTH'S TRUE MASTER!

ML: Very few people found it funny.

SG:I know! That disturbs me. The reason they didn't find it funny, I think, is that they are conditioned not to look for humor in a story like that. Man-Thing is a serious comic, ergo, everything must be serious. The duck is a funny comic; therefore it's ok to laugh at that. The serious aspect of the turnip story and the kung fu story of the duck also disturbed some people because they weren't expecting it. I find that most people liked and were able to accept these stories; more than were able to accept funny Man-Thing stories. Maybe it works easier one way, putting a humorous character in a serious situation than it does by putting a serious character in a funny situation. But the comics have been so earnest and so deadpan for so long in their presentation of those things that people don't know how to take a story on more than one level, I'm afraid. They can only see what the surface presents.

ML: Do you think that-- it seems we keep coming back to him-- some of the absurdity that Stan tried to interject, with Spiderman and some of the funny aspects of the Fantastic Four, putting superbeings into a real world, has been lost?

SG: No, I think it's become convention. That's part of the problem. Now it's ok and accepted and standard for superheroes to argue. It is ok for them to display human emotion and not have all the answers at their fingertips. Those things are now part of-- dare we say it?-- the comic book cliche. After fifteen years, you expect that. The problem now is going beyond that, breaking out of that cliche, and going on to establish a new cliche to be shattered again!

One of the things that upset me, when I went over to National during the two weeks that I wasn't working for Marvel, was that I spoke to Jeannette Kahn about what sort of thing she might be interested in my doing over there. She wanted another book like HOWARD THE DUCK! And when I told her I didn't think the answer was another funny animal, she looked a little bit disappointed. I'm afraid that that's what people are going to think, that if Howard becomes hugely successful, if the publicity propels it into the success of, say, Spiderman, people are going to think that funny animals are the new formula. That ain't why it worked!

That has nothing to do with why it worked! It has to do with the fact that Howard does not fit easily into a category, the fact the stories are not superhero stories or kung fu stories-- they're stories, that's all. They're just stories. It has to do with the presence of the character. I was thinking about this the other night, too. Mike Friedrich has asked me why I thought the duck had succeeded. My first answer was the standard one, "well, it's different," that no one else is doing funny animal stories this way right now. But the more I thought about it, the less I thought that was true. This sounds very bizarre, but the reason Howard himself has caught on, become such a phenomenon, is the fact that the character has a sexual presence.

ML: That does sound very bizarre-- can you explain that?

SG: Yes, I can!

ML: Please!

SG: Howard has been drawn by four or five different artists and each one's version

looks completely different, but the character's personality is so strong, his three dimensionality so obvious. You feel you could touch him; even though you'd feel feathers, it'd be a real being, y'know? It immediately sets him apart from all the other characters on the stands. The first thing that occurred to me was just looking at the two of them, anybody would know that Howard is sexier than Thor, for example. I don't know if that makes any sense to you.

The fact is that one of them has a certain physical orientation and the other doesn't. And it's true about Superman, it's true about Spiderman-- they're all so pristeen! It's hard to believe that any one of them isn't a virgin. And you know Howard isn't. I don't know how you know, but you know! He's real and he's got some sensual quality the others don't. I really think that that's what's responsible for the phenomenon. Although I think the recognition of it is subliminal. I don't think people realize it immediately looking at the character. I didn't.

ML: It's nothing Man-Thing had!

SG: No!

ML: Not much of a sexual attraction to Man-Thing.

SG: No, I think the success or failure of Man-Thing was due almost entirely to the stories. Some of the characters surrounding him—it was a case of just being able to find something in that book that you couldn't find someplace else. The horror stories had a certain basic appeal; the idea of a muck monster has a certain basic appeal.

ML: Or did at that particular time.

SG: Right. It was also a very well-designed character. The look of the monster was much better, for example, I thought, than that of Swamp Thing. It was an interesting character to look at. I think that's one reason he did so well for a while.

ML: The story there is very vague and not very accurately represented in fan circles. What is the story behind the success and then failure of the MAN-THING book ?

SG: At the time it was introduced in FEAR and through the first four or so issues of its own magazine, the book was one of Marvel's top sellers. It had been a monthly. The book was doing extremely well up through that last "Foolkiller" story. At times, percentage-wise, outselling DRACULA, outselling SPIDERMAN-- this is percentages; SPIDERMAN was selling more copies but it had a higher print run. It was the top book of the line for a couple of months! Then, mysteriously, with the fifth issue, Ploog's first, the sales started dropping, and never recovered. It was a slow but steady decline until toward the end, it was selling in the middle thirties, in terms of percent. And they cannot continue a book that has that sort of sales figures.

ML: What happened?

SG: I don't know. I think that part of it was that horror comics in general were losing their appeal. Part of it was overexposure. There was a time when there were sixteen MAN-THINGS a year-- four quarterlies and twelve regular books-- he was appearing on the cover of MONSTERS UNLEASHED-- and there were also six Len-and-Berni Swamp Thing stories coming out from National! People

got tired of muck after a while. The Swamp Thing character lasted longer but I don't think ran as many issues still as when Man-Thing was around. We did thirty-seven or thirty-eight of those books. I don't know how long Swamp Thing--

ML: It was canceled in it's middle twenties.

SG: So we ran literally twice as long as the SWAMP THING book. But after a while, virtually all of the horror characters have disappeared. There's been a resurgence of the superhero.

ML: One editor at Marvel said to me that one of the things that had contributed to Man-Thing's eventual failure was your writing, because it had gone either too far in one direction, or been too esoteric and too above the heads of the "kid" audience.

SG: It's possible. But I don't think those stories were terribly complex at all. I think they were just different from what was appearing in the other books. I don't think you had to be a Harvard graduate, a member of the literati, to understand those stories. I frankly don't find anything terribly profound in them! The character lent itself to a very different treatment than Dracula or the Hulk or other monsters.

ML: You really didn't have a character, in a sense.

SG: Yeah. In a sense thw whole thing, the empathy process, the orientation of the series, the character demanded a different kind of story, and that's what I gave it. I don't know. Maybe my writing did kill it. I would be willing to accept that as a possibility, but I don't think that's totally the truth.

ML: Before news came of its cancellation, you had left the book. Why?

SG: I didn't feel I had any more to give it. I just felt that after the twenty-second issue of its own book, I didn't have any more Man-Thing stories in me.

ML: You had "shot your load?"

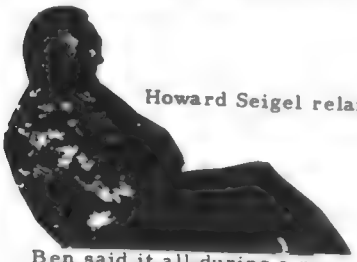
SG: Yeah, really. And I was surprised that I had stuck with the book that long. I was thinking of getting off it as early as the time Ploog left. I was then persuaded to stay with it. I did, and I really couldn't keep up with it longer than that. I was grateful that it was canceled when it was.

Part III (The conclusion) of the Mark Lerer/Steve Gerber interview will appear in the next issue of PFF.

And A Good Time Was Had By ALL....

by Howard Siegel
photos by Tom Hegeman

History repeated itself the weekend of April 23, 1977. Ten years before I had attended a comic art convention much like the one in progress. The attendance was perfect...not too large, not too small. You could look a t a dealer's wares without getting pushed or harrassed. No obnoxious pitchmen asking absurd prices. Pleasant exchanges and thank-yous. A revelation. The program was low-keyed and slow-paced. You had a nice agenda timetabled to allow you spare moments to reflect, rest, and meet others. Just like it once was before Superseulingcons became hassles and industrial production lines. The attendees were fans and collectors. The be-in-it-for-profit-only breed was absent.



Howard Seigel relaxing

Ben said it all during a moment of relaxation in roon 900. "We're doing it for enjoyment. For ourselves. If we break even that's all we can ask. If we do better it will be marvelous." That formula set the tone for all those nice people who made up the PCC. Each dutifully and happily shared the workload, maintaining his assignment without question. And it was easy for me to learn that I was in the company of learned panelologists, an opportunity rarely available these days. We had a rap session, but I didn't realize until my one man bandstand was almost over that in that friendly atmosphere I was actually participating in a part of the formal program. The air was that conducive to enjoyment.

I had quite a few suprises come my way. Meeting Roger Slifer in the elevator, Paul Levitz in the hallway and the triumverate of Pollard-Jones-Wilson at a table drawing sketches. What was seemingly a small con attracted a large crew of pros, and good ones at that. Such a turnout speaks for the sponsors, their articulate and overgenerous leader in particular. The next surprise was the

Editor
Mark Lerer

quality of the merchandise offered and displayed by the dealers. Rare items one usually finds only at big conventions. I was able to fill in some missing material for a new exhibit I'm curating at the Museum of Cartoon Art, much to my delight. The hotel, the magnificent university architecture across the street, the Sunday brunch. All formidable. All to be remembered for a long time. It was May in September. 1967 had returned. How lucky can you be?

Now before you get the idea that this is soft-soaping literature, I'm not being condescending nor am I paying back for my freebie weekend. The circumstances speak for themselves, and it can all be summed up by what took place at the final panel discussion chaired by the soon to be editor-emeritus and Princetonian-come-September, Mark Lerer. When the guest speakers rise at the dais and applaud the audience, that is the supreme compliment. Sitting at the sidelines

continued

(Left to Right) Dave Zema, Ben Pondexter, Keith Matteson, Ron Kienzle

E. Nelson Bridwell and admirer

taking it all in, I can honestly say that I have never been a part of, nor in the midst of a more intelligent group of comic art fans than those in attendance that day. Offering valid criticism, speaking with forethought and intelligently, the audience so impressed the Wein-Shooter-Cockrum-Slifer-Levitz-Bridwell-Siegel group that we discussed them with deep appreciation on the plane ride homethat evening. The usually silent and rarely impressed E. Nelson Bridwell was the first to express himself in that vein, a definitive affirmation of our pleasure. You can be sure that the word will circulate throughout the DC and Marvel offices accordingly.

The Bender Himself!

Every piece of writing should have a summary or epilogue. Mine is a sincere one. I've known the Pittsburgh Comix Club to be a rarity in these unfulfilled, perhaps sad panelogical times. The phoenix that made fandom, that gave the professional ranks its quorum, that has kept the industry manned, died seven years or so ago. But did it die? A flicker of flame stirred amongst the ashes last April. I suspect the phoenix will arise again and anew. This time it will have hatched from a nest built by a thoroughly knit, dedicated group. I say, thank you, PCCers, for a great time and the revelation that you are all a fine bunch of people. Who could ask for anything more?

Ron Kienzle's good side

'ALL AROUND'

column by Ben Pondexter

I had a dream.

This year's PITTCON saw that dream rise, fall, rise, fall. If you were there you know what I mean; it was the best time; it was the worst time.

Greg, I owe you.

If there is a next time, things will be different. For example, Greg, you should have complete charge of dealer room reservations, with your name as such on all ads.

The list of good guys is a mile long, that of bad, much shorter. Where do you belong?

I learned a great lesson from that past week: pride goes before a fall. Once again, I was proud to be the leader of the PCC.

Now, about next year....

(Note: Ben is devoting the rest of his column this issue to a very nice letter he received from science fiction author Stephen Goldin, which he'd like to share with the club.)

continued

Dear Ben Pondexter,

Thank you for your letter and for the sample fanzines. I'm glad you like the series so far, and I hope the future books will continue to please you. Sorry I'm taking so long to respond, but I was up against a deadline--just finished the 5th book in the series, THE BLOODSTAR CONSPIRACY. (Book #4, GETAWAY WORLD, is due out next month.)

As to how the series came to be, I'll see if I can simplify a long story. Doc Smith wrote a novella called "The Imperial Stars," which appeared in the May, 1964 issue of If. He'd been intending to write further works in the series, but his death the following year ended that.

There the matter rested until late in 1974. Pyramid Books, which has had such great success with Smith's earlier works, wanted to do more works under his name, and so they hit upon the idea of having some other writer expand upon the Family d'Alembert series. Roger Elwood, who was consulting editor for Pyramid, knew of my work because he'd already (at that time) bought two of my books for Laser. After checking with Smith's daughter, who controls the rights to Smith's literary estate, I was hired to novelize the novella and to write nine further books in the series (of which five are now complete and five more are to come). I was given the notes Smith had made concerning the series, which were very sketchy--mostly a history of the Stanley dynasty. I've had to add a lot from my own imagination, as well as correct a few flaws that Smith left in his original story (I don't know for sure, but I'm fairly certain he wrote it in a hurry.) Forinstance, although Smith says Russia dominated the entire Earth for a time, he originally had his characters spending dollars and using measurements like feet and inches; if that had actually been the case, the monetary system would be based on the ruble and all measurements would be metric--which is what I've done. Smith also did not account for inflation; he had people falling all over themselves to get a $5 tip, which just sounds wrong these days. Also, though the d'Alemberts speak a French-English mixture and the official language of the Empire is Russian-English, Smith did not flavor his story with expressions from either language; since I know a smattering of both French and Russian, I've tried to give a little taste of what the real languages would be like.

Shortly after I turned in the manuscript for the first book, I was in New York and I visited the Pyramid offices. Then-Vice President Norman Goldfind asked me what I would like to do about the covers, which surprised me greatly--publishers never ask an author's opinion of what should go on a cover. I promptly asked to have George Barr do them; George is not only a good friend of mine, but an outstanding artist as well. My suggestion was followed, and I'm delighted with the covers George has done so far.

I hope that helps you with the article you intend to write. I'd be greatly appreciative if, in return, you could send me a copy of the fanzine in which the article appears, for my files. Thanks.

continued

Incidentally, concerning the article on St. Trinians in one of the issues you sent: you might be interested in knowing that there is at least one more movie in the series than was mentioned by that writer. It's entitled The Pure Hell of St. Trinians, and I have seen it myself on television. My cousin's husband, who is British, tells me there were a lot more of the movies, too, but I've never seen any further evidence of them.

Again, thanks for your interest in the Family d'Alembert series, and I hope I never disappoint you.

Best,

Stephen Goldin

Stephen Goldin

One further item that may interest you: my wife (author Kathleen Sky) designs all the costumes that the characters wear (except for the first book; those were Smith's). Kathleen has won numerous awards at convention masquerades, and she's designing the costumes with that in mind.

Proposed Amendment to the Constitution of the Pittsburgh Comix Club

If the office of Vice-President or Secretary-Treasurer becomes vacant between elections, the President shall appoint, with consent of the majority of the membership, an interim appointment, who shall serve until the next election.

We'll be voting on this amendment to the club constitution at the next metting That's all for now. Hope to see you for San Diego!

MS. MARVEL
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BENDER & ESPOSITO '76